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Memory's Method: Time, Space, and Remembrance in Caribbean Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling has the power to transform and transplant an audience into a higher form of consciousness, presenting nuanced views and correcting inaccurate portrayals of people, places, and phenomena the world over. Analyzing how memory is used in the works of Maryse Condé (Tales from the Heart) *and Edwidge Danticat* (Breath, Eyes, Memory)*, the intent of this paper is twofold: first, to articulate the role of temporality, transnationalism, and traces of collective memory in form and content of their works, and second, to highlight the political function embedded in both texts, writing beyond self and opening a parentheses to challenge "one-sided historicity." I argue that a contextual and holistic understanding of what I call the three Ts (temporality, transnationalism, and traces of memory) as interconnected and not separate elements, are essential in the processes of Condé and Danticat, and the presence of Antillean identity they depict. As a result, an act of social justice is forged through literary critical analysis to represent and re-inscribe Caribbean cultural identity onto the global map.*

Keywords: Caribbean narratives, memory, transnationalism, memoirs, minority

"I come from a place where breath, eyes, memory are one…"
—Sophie Caco (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*)

"I was a 'black skin, white mask" and Frantz Fanon was going to write his book with me in mind…"
—Maryse Condé (*Tales from the Heart*)

Janie, the eight-year-old protagonist in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, introduced young Black girls to a world where they saw themselves in the mirror of her life, had their emotions validated through grief, elation, fear, mirth, and confusion, and for perhaps the first time, identified with a story that aligned with their complex experiences, struggles encircling race, gender, and coming of age. Setting the precedent, Zora Neale Hurston (1937) paved the way for many more narratives to follow that centered not only on Black reality but foregrounded particulars of women's lives rarely voiced. In the same vein, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why a Caged Bird Sings* (1969) amplified the vicissitudes of African American life from the perspective of a child. Incorporating Caribbean, American, and European landscapes, Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, and Maryse Condé all charge their diasporic texts with polylayered

and hybrid exchanges as well as encounters faced at "home" and abroad based entirely or loosely on their own lives by way of one channel—memory.

Storytelling has the power to transform and transplant an audience into a higher form of consciousness, presenting nuanced views and correcting inaccurate portrayals of people, places, and phenomena the world over. Memory is often the conduit for conveying truths from the stance of a survivor, witness, agent, activist, or artist. This paper analyzes how memory is used in *Tales from the Heart* (2001) by Maryse Condé and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) by Edwidge Danticat. The intent is twofold: to articulate the role of temporality, transnationalism, and the traces of memory in form and content of their works and then to highlight the political function embedded in both texts, writing beyond self and opening a parentheses to challenge "one-sided historicity."[1] Of this last orientation, a focus on marginalized voices is integrated. Reversing patterns of otherness by moving underrepresented perspectives from the margins to the center de-canonizes the literary repertoire that engages a particular spectrum. I argue that a contextual and holistic understanding of the three Ts—temporality, transnationalism, and traces of memory—as interconnected and not separate elements, are essential in the processes of Condé and Danticat and the presence of Caribbean identity they depict. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, experience is studied through narrative analysis. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) asserted that "the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). They further wrote that "the study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). The connections between storytelling and memory are analyzed through the experiences of the world in the narratives of Condé and Danticat.

The trajectory for this endeavor will be as follows: first, a contextual assessment of remembrance (traces of memory), time (temporality), and space (transnationalism) to situate how they will be understood and used in alignment with the texts; second, an analysis of the three Ts in the framework of Condé and Danticat's narratives; and third, an evaluation of the literary, social, and political function of memory in their works. Condé and Danticat are two examples of minority voices, as women of color, who speak from the vantage point of the Global South. Power dynamics are shifted and insight is given to view experience as told by themselves, not spoken for. A polylayered approach is taken to focus on inclusivity in and across identity spectrums. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) delineated the importance of integrating multiple modalities encircling the experiences of women of color in *Black Feminist Thought* by saying, "In order to capture the interconnections of race, gender, and social class in Black women's lives and their effect on Black feminist thought, I explicitly rejected grounding my analysis in any single theoretical tradition" (p. vii).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traces of Memory (Remembrance)

Providing a genealogy of memory spans various fields from sociology, psychology, cultural studies and neuroscience alike. Memory studies has consolidated these purviews in a

[1] Trouillot's argument in *Silencing the Past* (1995) centers around the process of historical production but also the two sides of historicity, engaging "simultaneously in the sociohistorical process and in narrative constructions about that process" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 24). To be doubly historical or fully historical, in this sense means to invest in both facets. What has occurred more than not is a lean towards the former, a one-sided involvement, or what he calls "one-sided historicity." How information is generated to be objective is important just as the actual story that is being told.

multidisciplinary expanse of conversations. Splitting this engagement into two different "waves," the former can be dated back to the 1920s with the interventions of art historian Aby Warburg and the release of French sociologist Maurice Halbwach's first of three installments on memory, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925), followed by *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte* (1941), and *La Mémoire Collective* (1950). Coining the term "collective memory," or "la mémoire collective," he posited memory as a social concept in which individuals recollect as members of a group with others bringing to a person's remembrance experiences of past or circumstances that can be retrieved in direct affiliation with other people. Drawing heavily from Durkheim and distinguishing himself from Freud's classification of personal memory, Halbwachs postulated that humans are social beings and as interactions and communication occur beyond the self, so too do memories, although the specific act is internal. He furthers that meaning is made in a social framework with language, knowledge, and traditions being central to experiences.

The second wave, occurring in the 1980s, is known commonly as a "memory boom" and credited to the notions of "lieux de mémoire" put forward by Nora (1989) and Assman's "cultural memory" (Assman, 1988; Olick, 2011). Building on Halbwach's social and theoretical model, Assman (1988) conflated collective memory with cultural identity to form cultural memory, linking everyday memory and collective self-image. Nora (1989) instead focused on French sites of memory to include physical places, rituals, and belief systems, although he did neglect France's history of immigration and colonization in selecting these "sites of memory." Other contributions to contemporary memory studies have delineated the nuances between history and memory, examined the mediums of cultural memory via literature and film, distinguished the common and differing threads within personal and collective memory, and investigated the implications of trauma and the ramifications of the Holocaust (Connerton, 1989; Erll, 2011; Misztal, 2003; Olick, 2011). The actual process of remembrance, according to Connerton (1989), is embodied and enacted through "habituated" performance. He stated in *How Societies Remember* that "We preserve versions of the past by representing it to ourselves in words and images" and used commemorations and re-enactments of the past as examples. Connerton (1989) continued with the practice of swimming as a mode of recapturing bodily behavior "sedimented in the body," by saying "many forms of habituated skilled remembering illustrate a keeping of the past in mind that, without ever adverting to its historical origin, nevertheless re-enacts the past in our present conduct" (p. 339).

Rejecting the term "mémoire collective" shared by all and differentiating between types of memory, Casey (2004) in "Public Memory in Place and Time" argued that there are four forms of human memory that are integral and interrelated in each configuration: individual, social, collective, and public memory. Recollection through language and states of affairs takes place in individual memory; kinship among friends and family is social; collective memory is experiential, event-, and memorial- focused; while public memory incorporates all three, and exists in past, present, and future.

Much more can be said about the variations, adaptations, and elucidations of memory's hermeneutics. The limitations, however, are as equally visible as the congruent avenues. In addition, one must question what recent developments have been made to memory within the discipline in the last two decades beyond consolidating texts and reconfiguring already mentioned notions. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy's (2011) reader on collective memory certainly responded to the gaps inherent between the two phases of discourse on memory by integrating contributions that predate Halbwachs' works and decade-by-decade insertions post Halbwach. The opening line of the introduction is valid in saying that "Memory, even conceived in its social dimensions, is hardly a new topic" and then proceeding to quote the

Hebrew reference of Moses telling Israel's assembly to "remember the days of old" (Olick et al., 2011, p. 3). Indeed, the concept is neither new nor does the field of study have substantial claims added as of late. The reference to Moses' plea seemingly hints at what they may regard as the first mention of a social engagement with the term; however, a Jewish context only solidifies the erasure of peoples who existed prior and the multitude of societies that are often invisible from the canonized discourse on memory, outside the Jewish and German traditions. Furthermore, the sensitive and problematic correlation of the bible used as a tool in seizing memories of civilizations beyond European borders and them being forced to change names, sacrifice lives, and endure physical, psychological, and emotional torment in exchange for "new" and conflicting identities is too exhaustive to explain in detail. Bodies and minds were not sufficient to colonize, so memories were taken too. Modernity had many prices and memory was one in which the costs were immeasurable and effects immense and long lasting.

This is not to discredit the Holocaust, the grounds on which memory studies stands, or counter the ongoing struggle among Palestinians and Jews in and beyond Israel's landscape, but many of the conversations encircling around memory, history, and identity point to one magnum opus at the silence of others. It is from this position of inclusion that the question arises, where in the realm of memory studies is the rest of the world?[2]

For the sake of this paper, the inquiry is rather, where in memory studies is the African diaspora? The African and Jewish diasporas do overlap, as is evident with Ethiopian Jews. However, beyond this point, in order to not superimpose theories of national identity onto people of the Global South, a point of departure is taken from the "traditional" study of memory nestled in memory studies to a focus on temporality. Prior to elucidating the span of temporality and an analysis of Condé and Danticat's narratives, a brief explanation of the restraints of memory studies is in order. In sum, there are three major limitations that can be understood in the continuum of past, present, and future.

Foremost, the dialogues in memory studies are anchored in the past. New and groundbreaking expansions are scarce and seemingly allude to refurbished jargons of old. Second, the present scope of the field is hollow, lacking concrete methodologies. Theories have been stretched and analyzed from various vantage points including mnemonics, semiotics, and symbiotics, but the application of these concepts beyond the domain of commemoration are few. Lastly, the future is unstable and uncertain. In the Afterword to *Memory in Culture*, entitled "Whither Memory Studies," Erll (2011) attempted to resuscitate a withering field by posing a vital question: "What are, then, promising roads for memory studies to take while it leaves behind the narrowing self-definitions, thematic restrictions, and methodological nationalism that were characteristic of its second phase and enters its third phase?" (p. 173).

Erll (2011) proposed a shift in outlook—to view memory within the discipline as a process rather than a fixed notion, adopting a transcultural perspective, and dislodging the ties to nation-states in this global age. These alterations would transform memory studies into a novel field of study, and her further charge to see memory as "the very apparatus that enables change" is inspiring. However, her German, literary, and media studies approach—although it does touch on an interdisciplinary mode—still does not include the international. Hence, the imperative to de-canonize texts remains, as the third phase is embarked. As she stated, "the reason lies in the future" (Erll, 2011, p. 175). Deferring to the unknown is not a solution and the path to progression is grim without actual texts that address the shortcomings and voids with the rest of the world and advanced insights at the center.

[2] This question is a variation of Sandra K. Soto's (2005) essay titled, "Where in the Transnational World are U.S. Women of Color?"

Temporality (Time)

The more things change, the more they stay the same. This resignation indicates shifting patterns that are sure to surface over again but also connotes the dialogic interplay events have with time. Past, present, and future exist in one continuum, and what was *is* because both are always becoming. While Halbwachs' perspective on time and memory was on how the past informs the present, Mead (1932) sought to theorize how the present gives meaning to the past. He posited in "Philosophy of the Present,"

> *It is that there is and always will be a necessary relation of the past and the present but that the present in which the emergent appears accepts that which is novel as an essential part of the universe, and from that standpoint rewrites its past. The emergent then ceases to be an emergent and follows from the past, which has replaced the former past.* (p. 11).

For Mead, the past and future were both hypothetical abstractions accessed through the present. Using science as his basis, he drew from nature and the environment as examples to show the irrevocability of the past and time being a "metaphysical necessity" (Mead, 1932, p. 10). Essentially, putting forward a philosophy of being, Mead (1932) concentrated on what *is*—the "emergence" and progress of present. The past, he stated, is in the present and conscious experience can be found in memory.

Memory for Mead (1932) is "that part of the conditioning nature of passage which reflects itself into the experience of the organic individual" (p. 17). Flaherty and Fine (2001) further outlined Mead's concentration on time in his writings in "Past, Present, Future," by alluding to the present being the "paramount form" of temporality for Mead (Flaherty & Fine, 2001, p. 150). They found that it is from the standpoint of the present that the past is constantly reinterpreted and this process "is implicated in the process of collective memory" (Flaherty & Fine, 2001, p. 152). What both works resurface is the contextualization of memory through time. This simultaneous three-way opening of time allows for one to exist in the present, actualizing the past and projecting towards the future in an uninterrupted sequence. The importance, specifically with regard to narratives, is inherent in the present condition defining and reconfiguring the past, while at the same time propelling into the future. An interrelated stance breaks from the linearity and disparate notion of the three as separate entities that define themselves.

Temporality is of major significance in Zerubavel's *Time Maps* (2003), as it also views memory from the angle of time providing a tangible and pragmatic analysis. Moving past linear historical trajectories in narratives, Zerubavel (2003) delved into how time is mapped throughout history elucidating patterns, episodes of silence, and utterances, by way of what is designated important and what is discarded and thus becomes a non-mention. He opens the book with an exegesis of types of narratives and their complements ranging from progress/decline, circular/linear, to staccato/legato.

Analyzing 190 calendars and tracing the patterns and particulars in each, Zerubavel (20003) argued that in every epoch there exists events but only particular ones are highlighted with importance and commemorated as rituals, holidays, and traditions. Referring to what he calls "mnemonic hegemony," power and the hierarchy of moments are captured and thus memories as a result (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 103). Zerubavel (2003) aligned with Trouillot's (1995) premise that history is a construct and the inner threads of the master narratives are lines forged into being and over time become lodged into our minds as memories. Both also assess how the past is organized in our collective memories, strategically placed and pronounced for a

particular way of thinking. This encapsulates indoctrination within and beyond bounds. The pedagogical implications are evidenced in how history is framed through specific narratives and the perpetuation of select stories and hegemonic frameworks are taught to students. Over time, the narratives become history with a capital "H" while other accounts become secondary or disregarded altogether. Exposing racism in historiography and then adding alternate dialogues from around the world are necessary steps for minority progress.

Transnationalism (Space)

Transnational and postcolonial writers aim to shift the universal claims of history with a capital "H" in order to foreground the many distinct voices that have been silenced. Perspective is key and though history has a close link to memory, it is also intertwined with power. He who has the loudest voice speaks, and the world beckons that call. The sound of White masculine vocalization has resonated throughout time to mold anyone of a different phenotype and genotype as inferior, especially where profit and production are concerned. If resistance ensues, annihilation will follow. At best, posited Trouillot (1995), "History is a story about power, a story about those who won" (p. 5). Trouillot's task in *Silencing the Past* was to unveil the invisible marks of power and how the past has been scripted to tell the story of a particular people as entitled, superior, and destined for world conquest and everyone else by default are their loyal subjects. The process of how history works—the narratives laden with skewed information about the haves and the have-nots—permeate every domain of social interaction from pages in history books, visual and audial programs in the media, to the sedimented stereotypes the psyche reproduces and the actions propelled from these reservoirs of representation.

Providing an extended treatise on the Haitian Revolution, Trouillot (1995) focused on Columbus' invasion, Palais Sans Souci, and the figures of the rebellion and filled in the gaps while exposing how the past is both secreted through commemorations and celebrations and makes certain events "unthinkable." Central to Trouillot's argument is the process of historical production but also the two sides of historicity, engaging "simultaneously in the sociohistorical process and in narrative constructions about that process" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 24). To be doubly historical or fully historical in this sense means to invest in both facets. What has occurred more often than not is a lean towards the former, a one-sided involvement, or what he called "one-sided historicity." How information is generated to be objective is important, just as the actual story that is being told.

Other writers of the African diaspora are also concerned with the silences in history. Hartman (2007) wrote *Lose Your Mother*, with the intent of "fill[ing] in the blank spaces of the historical period and to represent the lives of those deemed unworthy of remembering" (p. 16). What follows is a personal journey to Ghana to uncover and trace the African slave routes, imbibing her slim findings with depth, breadth, and life. She eulogized the dead souls tortured and mangled into subjection with her words, remembering them, memorializing them, and speaking on their behalf. Hartman (2007) learned much about herself as she did the lives she researched against the backdrop of African and African American identity.

Similarly, but in the domain of discourse, Pierre (2013) analyzed the debates within the spheres of Afrocentrism and diaspora studies, addressing the pitfalls and shortcomings. The same similarities can be drawn to the Negritude and Creolité binaries. Also sojourning to Ghana, Jemima Pierre (2013) investigated modernity in Africa and the lack of dialogue on Ghana today beyond the tropes of passé parlance. Her ethnography did not just talk about the problems but sought a solution. She offered an alternate view into contemporary Ghanian life through First Friday Accra, a social monthly event that brings young minority professionals

together and forges interactions between native Ghanaians and the Black expat community. Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* was one concept in African diasporic studies Pierre critiqued for being underdeveloped. She stated, "Gilroy effectively negates the possibility of exploring the mutuality of African and Black diasporic modern identities" (Pierre, 2013, p. 213). Indeed Gilroy's transnational scope of making identities within the shores of Africa and America equal in importance directly challenges essentialism. Pierre (2013) added the "so what?" to his contribution and dealt with the now and real lives, a step away from the imagined and past postures Africa is usually spoken in. Similarly, Wright's (2004) concern in *Becoming Black* is also to break the binary purview in her assessment of Black subjectivities, but she goes a step further to include the voices of women absent from the discourse on the African diaspora. Her genealogy of Black subjectivity from the early twentieth century to the 1960s writings of W.E.B Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor and Frantz Fanon show the patriarchal and nationalist frameworks in which they are situated. Adding Carolyn Rodgers, Audre Lorde, Joan Riley, Naomi King, Jo Hodges and Andrea Levy to the conversation expands the limited fields of inquiry surrounding identity to cross race and gender in order to not "(re)produce the same structure of exclusions with a Black subject reliant on Black Others in order to come into being" (Wright, 2004, p. 6). This reference stresses the hierarchy of signification that erases, dismisses and subjugates Black female subjects and the process of bringing them into being.

ANALYSIS

Memory As Method

Memoirs personify the personal as political. The writings are much less about the author talking about self, than about expressing the patterns and particulars of life in all of its truths. Novels with a semi-autobiographical context reflect a similar trope. In addition, texts that reflect the lives, myths, realities, and languages of underrepresented persons provide a holistic understanding of communities from perspectives of the Global South. The first of eight novels by Haitian author Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* tells the tale of four generations of women, the Cacos, who grapple with kinship, love, belonging, abandonment, secrecy, struggle, and healing. Told from the position of 12-year-old Sophie Caco, her hybrid experiences in Croix-Des-Rosets, Haiti, and New York are filled with revelations and transformations as she journeys to make sense of who she is by understanding the women in her family. Danticat gave the tropes of migration, movement, fluidity, myth, and spirituality central importance as change and constancy are interwoven. The metaphors in the title—breath, eyes, and memory—allude to the metaphysical, corporeal, and mental faculties that enable life to persist in harmony. There is no dichotomy in being, all is one—earth, sky, water, human, animal are connected—giving new meaning to as well as challenging the separate tripartite interpretations of mind, body, and spirit.

Present and past are conflated through memory, and as Sophie ages and tragedy ensues, she too realizes that she and her mother are alike just as Martine and Grandmère were too. Survival and freedom are additional themes that expound the boundaries of gender in Danticat's narrative. Societal norms, violence, and trauma are impressed upon the bodies of the women in the novel through Martine's rape, the series of testing Sophie succumbs to, and the emotional, physical, and mental repercussions. Historically, the Black female body has long been the site of power and conquest and to themselves shame and confinement. Danticat (2004) shifted the domination paradigm with the recurring question "Ou libéré?" (Are you free?). At the end of the novel, Sophie's process comes full circle; she knows how to respond, takes

ownership of her own body, and breaks from the cycle of subjectivity that oppressed her and her relatives.

Condé (2001) painted a vivid picture of her past in *Tales From the Heart: True Stories from my Childhood*, a quite personal glimpse into her life. As a bona fide griotte, Condé's storytelling captures the reader to follow through 17 detailed mini portraits of her youth. These vignettes are not self-contained; each ends and one is left pondering the motifs that have been woven together. Her transparency is evident, and her younger self is presented as a growing, persevering, and learning being who navigates of the world around her through interactions with family, friends, strangers, and experiences encountered. Set in Guadeloupe and France, Condé slides between locales, explaining in context what racial, social, colonial, and economic ramifications are attached to the two. Her wit, humor, and honesty trail page by page as she comes into herself, not "finding" who she is because she was never lost, but becoming herself.

Race and class are core motifs in Condé's memoir and the process of discovery pre-, during, and postcomprehension of the color line is described in detail. There seems to be a dialogue between her childhood self and her adult person in reflexivity. She zooms in and out of past and present to align the partitioned yet threaded events in her story. In the 13th chapter entitled "School Days," Condé (2001) delineated a class presentation her Communist teacher asked her to give on "a book from her island" while attending Lycée Fénelon. Her research led her to Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1950) and it awakened her Caribbean identity. She stated that it taught her about Blackness, her double consciousness human condition, and the conflicts between the White mask she wore in Black skin, a reference to Fanon's dialectic metaphor for Black identity formation. She asserts "Today, I am convinced that what I later called somewhat pretentiously 'my political commitment' was born at that very moment, the moment I had been forced to identify with poor José," the main character in Zobel's novel (Condé, 2001, p. 110). This is not the only direct reference to the reader in present tense; earlier in the same illustration, she says, "Those of you who have not read *Rue Cases-Nègres* have perhaps seen Euzhan Palcy's film *Sugar Cane Alley*" (Condé, 2001, p. 108). *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (*Black Shack Alley*) (1950) follows young José through public and private navigations of self and society in Martinique during 1930. A story about race, class, colonization, and survival, José's grandmother M'man Tine does everything to ensure the success of her grandson beyond poverty and the plantation life they were accustomed to. The novel, based on Zobel's own memories of his childhood, was adapted to film, *Sugar Cane Alley*, in 1983 by Palcy. Like a folklorist, the elements of orality in the scenes she retells capture her satire, jests, trickster disposition at times, and clever nature while peeling through the whys and hows of life.

Both texts exemplify the tenets of critical race and postcolonial theory, foregrounding race and the intersections of subordination, challenging the dominant ideology, being committed to social justice, centralizing experience, and using a transdisciplinary—and in these particular monographs, a transnational—perspective (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). Orality in Caribbean literature is demonstrated in the imagery, language, and polylayered exchanges the characters employ. Race, class, gender, spirituality and ableism simultaneously give meaning to Sophie and Maryse as transnational women. From Maryse's blind father to Sophie's mother who has a double mastectomy and wears a prosthetic bra, disability is not only depicted but far from shown as flawed or a basis for isolation.

Memory serves as a method of discovery and renewal, linking self to space and society in more ways than one with the lives of the authors as first person sources. Although collective memory is apparent in the paths both women follow, for their experiences can be seen as recollected in a social framework, it is their autobiographical memory that is pronounced as

instruments of engagement. *Tales from the Heart* commences with the vignette "Family Portrait" and Condé's parents are introduced even before she is; however, this is to illustrate how they shaped her identity, her critique of them as colonial subjects, and her individual development as consciousness is raised. She is discussed in a social context in order to explain them as "alienated individuals" as her brother Sandrino called them, but works through her racial identity using her own memory. Similarly, Danticat's characters are fused by blood and kinship; however, it is no coincidence that Sophie, like Danticat, was left in Haiti to be raised by her aunt until the age of 12 and then sent for by her mother to live with her in America. Danticat may not be Sophie, but there is a part of the author imbedded in the protagonist and that transference happens by way of the combination of Danticat's individual memory and imagination.

In "The Site of Memory," Toni Morrison (1995) frames writing as a sort of literary archaeology, the process of journeying to a "site" in order to reconstruct the world through the "remains" that are implied (p. 92). The Mississipi River is used to illustrate how water floods, or remembers its place even when people attempt to straighten out passageways for homes to be built. "All water," stated Morrison, "has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (p. 99). Writers, she posited, are the same, endeavoring to recollect some aspect of the past. The flow of Condé and Danticat's narratives provide a glimpse into the bounded relationship between imagination and memory, past and present.

Tales from the Heart and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* exist beyond the progress, decline, or zigzag plot lines of unilinear narrative structures Zerubavel (2003) detailed, adhering more to a circular or cyclical mode of operation. Time is not a straight arrow but folds back on itself frequently as it also advances in a continuum. As the past informs the present and vice versa, the experiences of the characters are not locked in either. Place is also redefined and the centrality of their experiences in the Caribbean as well as American and European metropoles dispel a hierarchy in cultural representations. The Paris that Condé's parents glamorize is not the same space she speaks of at the time, contributing to her isolation and homesickness. At 13 she became "less and less convinced that Paris was the capital of the universe" calling the city "a prison of dry stones and a maze of Métros and buses where people remarked on my person with a complete lack of consideration" (Conde, 2001, p. 105). In *Tales from the Heart*, she described Guadeloupe in vivid detail with the blue harbor and sky of La Pointe and the panoramic view of Les Saintes.

The French department is given importance and affirmation, and does not exist in this text to bring economic advantage to the colonial power. Sophie, despite living in New York since her adolescence, calls Haiti home, decades later after revisiting her grandmother there. Joseph, her husband says, "You've never called it that since we've been together. Home has always been your mother's house, that you could never go back to" (Danticat, 1994, p. 195). Her remembrance is solidified on her return and transnationalism further visible with her having more than one "home" pending on the posture of her heart or physical presence. The transnational figure may also not have a specific place to claim like Marjane Satrapi in her memoir Persepolis, who traveled during the Iranian revolution to Vienna and Paris, but did not say either became her "home" and neither was Tehran, where she could no longer return to. Condé and Danticat's texts merge temporality, transnationalism, and traces of memory into an intertwined assemblage. One does not exist without another and permeates the spheres of each as a result.

CONCLUSION

Personal as Political

Tales from the Heart and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* imbue the axes of ontology and epistemology with new meaning as they not only focus on being but doing. The political function therein challenges the "one-sided historicity" presented in influential ideologies and provides an alternate means of seeing and comprehending Caribbean identity, womanhood, and Blackness among other angles of intersection. Condé and Danticat paint powerful pictures of realities from an insider's perspective that are not locked in time; their mobile temporalities create routes in exchange for roots. Dismantling the representations of Antillean life in dominant discourses, the gaze through a White supremacist, masculine, misogynist, and bigoted lens, is confronted and a polylayered existence, culture, language, and people reinscribed onto the global map. The Caribbean in these narratives no longer serves as being an exoticized space, an anchor for monopolized and manipulated travel and tourism promoting capitalist agendas. The islands of mention and their inhabitants are voiced with value and debunk the myth of the Caribbean being a "nonspace," a region to travel through and not to, a restover historically lodged in the psyche of many since colonization. It was never intended to be a permanent place of residence but merely a surface for seasoning bodies, a working ground, a carrefour, or intersection fattening the pockets of imperialism on either side of the Atlantic, from Europe to America's shores. However, within these narratives and through the amplified utterances of others like Amy Jacques Garvey, Carole Boyce Davies, Audre Lorde, Suzanne Cesaire, and Jane and Paulette Nardal, the Antilles are given space and women power of speech in dialogue and discourse. Their personal pledges remain political—changing the course of time, history, literature, education, and social systems in the African diaspora.

Foregrounding underrepresented experiences through narrative expression is a valid form of knowledge acquisition, a powerful tool of activism and an effective feminist method. These purposes include re-presenting a people as empowered and full instead of fragmented and subjugated, to expose the workings of White supremacy, to affect some kind of change on a global, national, societal, community or individual level and engage social justice. If one person, or a group of people, is moved to see themselves differently, or see difference as it exists, then impact is made. For the many children who read texts where they do not see themselves, writers have changed how women are projected throughout history and in the memory of the masses and add to the body of inclusive literature.

The spirit of people past, present, and future is visible and acknowledged and vibrations reverberated across time, space and memory. In response to the bone chilling question posed at the African Burial Ground reinterment ceremony in 2003, "Who will speak for our ancestors?" both Condé and Danticat's texts reply in the affirmative. As counternarratives, the memory in form and content of their works build on Mary Prince's 1831 memoir, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Woman: A Will to be Free*. The echo of memory still speaks and says, "nous libéré" (we are free).

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